Massive luxury resort plan goes before Adirondack Park Agency

More than 300 acres along the Ausable River targeted by Miami-based developer

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A view of the Ausable River in Wilmington, N.Y. in June 2020. In fall 2021, a Miami developer proposed a massive 350-acre luxury resort along the river that would be about 10 miles north of Wilmington. Lauren Stanforth/Times Union

Townhomes, villas, and mansions: Jay subdivision project to go before APA

A Miami-based developer is proposing to build a luxury resort on more than 350 acres in the Town of Jay along the Ausable River, outside the hamlet of Au Sable Forks. Representing one of the largest subdivision plans to go before the Adirondack Park Agency, the development would consist of 72 hotel rooms, mansions, a villa and townhouse lodgings.
The Adirondack Park Agency released plans for the project on Monday and invited comments through Dec. 3.

Details in an application filed with the APA show a complex with 20 townhomes, 60 villas, 18 larger estate properties, six mansions and up to 72 hotel units. Many of the buildings have views of the Adirondack High Peaks.

An alternative sketch of the proposed subdivision in Jay, submitted as part of the application submitted to the Adirondack Park Agency.

It is one of the biggest resort projects to go before the park agency, albeit not the largest. A proposed 719-unit subdivision in Tupper Lake, the Adirondack Club and Resort, which developers failed to create, won APA approval in 2012. The latest large-scale subdivision the APA approved earlier this spring was a 32-home development around a Fulton County lake.

Eric Stackman is the owner and developer of the Jay property. He runs a construction consulting company called ECS 1 Inc. in South Florida. Stackman began purchasing property in the Adirondacks in 2006, real property records show.

In a phone interview on Monday, Stackman said he has been waiting for the right time to propose a project in the region. He had originally been looking at the
white-capped mountains of Colorado, but property was cheaper in the Adirondacks, he said. Over the last year he noticed more people buying real estate in the Adirondack Park.

“Timing is just everything, and it just seems the timing is really ripe now. It’s all just coming to fruition.”

— Eric Stackman, owner and developer of the Jay property

Stackman said he has been building luxury highrises and restaurants in South Florida for years. Now, he seeks to expand his portfolio to the northeast, he said. His Jay property, within a half-hour drive to Whiteface Mountain in Wilmington, is in a region offering biking, hiking and skiing opportunities, he said. Stackman envisions creating a one-stop-shop with resort-style amenities.

“As far as convenience,” Stackman said, “there’s not much going on over there, but that’s where I come in.”

Stackman’s application plans also mention a renewable energy farm, trails, club building and staff housing. But he declined to reveal specifics or the project cost at this time. Stackman said he wants to hear how the public will react to his proposal. Some of it may change.

Knut Sauer, a town of Jay councilman, said on Tuesday that Stackman’s application came as a surprise to the town board. He said he needed more information, but he was “cautiously excited” about the proposal.

“The town of Jay has land and needs,” Sauer said. “I do welcome development, but this is a big one.”

Sauer is also on the board of directors for an existing housing development in Jay called Ausable Acres. That development, he said, has around 400 homes though they’re smaller in size than what Stackman is proposing to build. There are more people buying land and building homes at Ausable Acres over the last year, Sauer said. There are still undeveloped lots, but Sauer doesn’t believe Stackman’s plans would have a negative impact on Ausable Acres.

Based on the APA application, Sauer believes Stackman’s plans are more upscale and he is excited about the potential for the town to gain a broader property tax base. But he’s also concerned about the lack of housing for full-time Adirondack Park residents.

“That is obviously not part of this particular development,” Sauer said.
Stackman wants his resort to blend with the natural environment. He pointed to the proposed designs and how the homes are not spread across the property, but are more clustered together. And while he understands some may think his proposal is large, Stackman stressed that it is on more than 350 acres.

David Gibson, managing partner of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, said his initial reaction to the proposal is that it is “overly brief” and does not address conservation design.

“The idea of conservation design is to concentrate development near existing infrastructure,” Gibson said. “The current concept appears to spread it out. One aspect of this is the amount of new road development proposed. New roads are particularly damaging. Conservation design, done well, minimizes the length of new roadways.”

The APA created its large-scale subdivision application, which is what Stackman has submitted for public comment, to address conservation design. Agency staff have touted such applications as sufficient for addressing impacts to natural resources. However, environmental organizations like Gibson’s believe these applications fall short. Groups like Adirondack Wild, the Adirondack Council, Protect the Adirondacks and others are pushing for legislation that would strengthen the APA’s authority to require developers use best practices of conservation design. A bill stalled in the state Legislature last year.

Comments on the plan may be submitted to Devan Korn, Adirondack Park Agency, P.O. Box 99, Ray Brook, NY 12977 or to https://apa.ny.gov/Hearings/ApaCommentPopup.cfm?ProjectNumber=2021-0248.